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AUTHOR Clarke, Johnnie Ruth
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ABSTRACT

In order for junior colleges to attract and retain nontraditional students (ethnic minorities, women, senior citizens, etc.), they must translate institutional commitment into action. Chief administrators must make their attitudes toward nontraditional students known to all college personnel if the climate for learning is to improve. Those who recruit nontraditional students must be aware of various cultures and life styles, must command total knowledge of college operations, academic requirements, curriculum, and job markets, and must honestly present financial aid possibilities. Registration procedures must be improved to facilitate admissions. Counselors should provide the student with a caring image of the college and should help underwrite student success through careful and non-threatening diagnosis and placement. Study programs should be individualized according to academic skills and interests; career-oriented curricula, learning styles, flexible scheduling, and performance objectives should also be emphasized in educating nontraditional students. Teacher-training should give future instructors a more accurate picture of nontraditional student needs and characteristics. Also, in order to fully integrate nontraditional students into the college, they should be encouraged to participate in extra-curricular activities. (DC)

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COMMITMENT TO THE NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT

By

Johnnie Ruth Clarke
Associate Dean of Academic Affairs
St. Petersburg Junior College
Florida

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ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges
University of California
Los Angeles 90024

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COMMITMENT TO THE NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT

Johnnie Ruth Clarke
St. Petersburg Junior College

College presidents have almost unanimously expressed desires to increase services to the somewhat new pool of students who include members of minority groups, women, and senior citizens, and to increase the effectiveness of these services. Since these presidents are also seriously concerned with Full Time Equivalency, many have redoubled their efforts toward enrolling more nontraditional students. A major problem, however, lies in the fact that their commitment and fervor are often not translated downward; administrative enthusiasm loses its spark before it finally reaches the student.

To a large extent, planning for the development of these new students depends on the means of assessing their talents, interests, and past achievement. Initiating these students into the academic and social life of the college requires change and flexibility in staff attitudes and institutional structure. Examination of personal and academic counseling techniques and procedures should result in some type of planned program for assisting the nontraditional student in goal selection and goal attainment. There must also be an examination of the present structure and content of the curriculum and instructional techniques used to develop pertinent educational experiences for nontraditional students. Once commitment has been made to these students, the college can effectively work toward improving recruitment, admission, counseling, academic planning, and student activities.

INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT

The community junior college has had some success in reaching the nontraditional student. Nearly all schools have adopted an open-door policy, flexible schedules, remedial and compensatory programs, special counseling and tutorial services, and a variety of other services. The success of these attempts can be seen in the increasing number of nontraditional students attending community junior colleges, the increasing number of these

students who are graduating, and the attention these colleges are receiving from other agencies. In spite of this, large numbers of nontraditional students are not making it to the community junior college and the attrition rate of those who do is decreasing only slightly. This, then, points out the need to make greater efforts to strengthen the democratization function of the colleges.

A more dynamic communication process of institutional commitment to the lower echelons of the college structure is one way to attain this goal. Translating institutional commitment to the action level may be achieved in many ways, for example:

1. The chief administrator must make known to all college personnel his position. If this is done in an oral presentation with a question and answer period, it is most effective. In any case, he should make sure that the message reaches all persons (including nonacademic staff).
2. He should request the next administrative level to furnish him with plans for translating his position into activities. These plans should include some means of evaluating their effectiveness.
3. The chief administrator should develop means of feedback from all levels, including from the students.
4. When certain degrees of success have been reached, the chief administrator should have a means of giving reinforcement.

These suggestions may appear to be too directive but experience has shown that many faculty members, counselors, and other staff personnel do not believe or understand the seriousness of institutional commitment. Once the institution's position toward the nontraditional student is established throughout, the climate for learning will improve for both the traditional and nontraditional student.

RECRUITMENT

Recruitment of nontraditional students makes it necessary to examine many aspects of the college usually taken for granted. First, the commitment of the college must be real. All levels of authority must make it clear to the total college that these students are desired and that resources

will be available for them. Too often recruiters have found that when large numbers of nontraditional students have reported for registration, the real problems begin. The attitude of the faculty and middle level administrators operate to "turn-off" the nontraditional student. The positive position of the college should be evident in all phases of its operation and the administration should periodically develop some means of testing its climate.

Second, the financial aid package should be realistic and true. Unfulfilled expectations of nontraditionals cause numerous complaints. One of the most common complaints is that the amount of financial aid actually received is not the same as that promised. Another complaint is that the aid did not cover certain items which it was expected to cover. It is important that there be a simple and true explanation of what the college can offer and precisely which costs are covered.

Work-study programs need to be handled with realism and sensitivity. Many of the jobs which colleges offer are beyond--and often beneath--the skills of the students. The recruiter should carefully analyze each student's aptitudes and abilities before committing the student to a job. A key element in work-study programs is that the work and the study relate essentially to the student's needs. A student interested in a paramedical work-study program might become dejected if the "work" turned out to be a dishwashing job in a hospital. On the other hand, it is important that jobs not be too advanced for less experienced students. Skillful counseling may help the student to accept a job he or she might consider degrading. Unskilled nontraditional students should be informed about actual job options before accepting work-study grants.

The pivotal element in the success of recruitment efforts is the selection of the recruiter. Recruiters of similar ethnic and social backgrounds as nontraditional students served will not necessarily accomplish the goals of the college nor will they automatically foster trust and respect from students. Recruiters should command thorough knowledge of the college operation, academic requirements, curriculum, and job markets. Moreover, recruiters should relate comfortably with nontraditionals. They must be familiar with the various cultures and life styles and know the significant

influential persons and places in the students' environment. Above all, in the competition for students, recruiters must maintain their colleges' integrity.

Recruitment Decisions

When the college is "ready" to recruit nontraditional students, it must develop meaningful academic experiences for them. It must make provisions for uncomplicated registration and class assignments, predicated on a curriculum designed for academic success. Course structure, organization, and methods can be so designed that the nontraditional student will have an opportunity to achieve mastery.

Before the recruiter begins the recruiting process the college should consider the following:

1. What types of nontraditional students are desired--adults, veterans, women, Blacks, Chicanos, Indians, etc?
2. Is there enough financial assistance--what type--how much--type of packages?
3. Do recruiting materials project the image the college desires?
4. Can the prospective student handle the recruiting and admissions materials? Does the recruiter know the community well enough to tap significant recruiting resources? Will he need help?
5. What "in college" students can be involved in the recruiting program?
6. What changes in the curriculum need to be made in order to accommodate nontraditional students?
7. What changes in other areas of the college need to be made in order to increase the retention of nontraditional students?
8. What type of articulation pattern should be developed with high schools, agencies, business, etc.?

Suggestions to Aid in Recruitment

1. Select an advisory committee of community persons to give input to the recruitment process. Such persons should represent the alumni, feeder schools, present students, businessmen, community leaders, parents.
2. Use some students and faculty members in the recruitment process.

3. Examine recruitment materials to see if they are readable, and include pictures related to nontraditional students.
4. Build good rapport with counselors at feeder schools.
5. Start recruitment process at junior high school level.
6. Advertise positive aspects of the school in all media.
7. Aim special recruitment efforts to parents or spouses of nontraditional students.
8. Publicize successful nontraditional students.

ADMISSION OF NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

One of the major problems hindering admission of nontraditional students is the assortment of various forms students must complete. These forms often request information which is unnecessary, and frequently inaccessible. Written directions are often vague and procedures contained in the catalogue are often written for admission officers or registrars rather than students. In order to complete admission requirements, the student often has to make two or three trips to a college miles from his home territory at office hours that conflict with his working hours. All of these represent barriers to the admission of nontraditional students.

The registration process itself is almost a nightmare. The formal procedure usually requires sophistication which these students do not possess. Such directions as "Take this card to the young lady seated at the terminal"; "This class is closed so you must select an alternative"; "Have you discussed this course with your department?" are concepts often foreign to the student's previous experiences. A close examination of any admission and registration procedure reveals much duplication of information and many nonessential steps.

Words of caution--When a college accepts a commitment to open-door admission, in order to give it genuine value, it must be adequately funded. "To make open admission work, we need more extensive remedial programs, much smaller classes, sensitive counseling services and adequate physical plant so that libraries, for example, become places in which students can actually read and work."[1] Open-door admission does not have to mean high

[1]Editorial, "The Case for Open Admission," Change. Summer, 1973, Vol. 5 No. 6, p. 10.

attrition, watered-down curriculum and lowering of standards. It can have real meaning for students who have become accustomed to failure and it can make a real contribution to the college. To make the open-door policy an entree to success for nontraditionals the college must carefully study admissions procedures, counseling programs, faculty skills and attitudes, and financial resources.

Suggestions for Improving Admission Procedures

1. Develop a simple postal card for the initial admission step. This card would ascertain the most pertinent data, such as name, address, social security number, and other personal and academic data. Distribute these cards where they will be accessible to the students. Wide distribution in the student's neighborhood and school is necessary.
2. Develop a simple postal card reply which lists the items which the student should have on file before reporting for counseling and registration. Also, please state whether you will accept the student. Students want an acceptance reply.
3. Develop a simple form which can be completed at registration to get other needed data. The medical form and other information can be secured after the student is enrolled.
4. Transcripts of students' previous academic records are often very difficult to secure. If it is not too much of a problem, a request from the college to the schools previously attended by the student is often more effective than a request by the student.
5. Do not require students to make frequent trips to the college to secure acceptance.
6. Set up temporary admissions places in the community. Publicize these very well; use the local radio stations. More students listen to the radio than read newspapers.
7. Train all staff personnel to receive students with patience and understanding. More people are turned away by clerks than any other group on campus. The image of the college is frequently set by staff people.

Suggestions for Improving Registration Procedures

1. Plan to have second-year nontraditional students help with registration. They know what the problems are and they know where a student can secure help.
2. Registration personnel should be aware of some of the problems nontraditionals face. They should know that many of the things they take for granted will be new to these students.
3. Be sure that the language is interpreted. "Prerequisites" is a difficult word; "closed" may have a very different meaning; "transfer credit" may be foreign; "Associate of Arts Degree" has different meaning for different people; even "required" and "electives" may be misunderstood.

COUNSELING AND THE NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT

Counseling is a crucial area of academic life. Indeed, the first point of contact with the college is usually made by the student with the counselor, and the initial orientation to the college is given by counselors. Thus, they provide the first impressions of what college is like. Unsure nontraditional students may be excessively impressed by the counselor's expressions and personality. Their lack of sophistication may cause them to place a great deal of confidence in what the counselor does.

This places a great responsibility on the counseling area and maybe this is what counseling is all about. Maybe counseling should provide the student with a caring image of the college. Maybe it should help underwrite the success of the student through careful and non-threatening diagnosis and placement. If counseling assumes these responsibilities, the student can begin to deal with his academic problem and with himself in a more realistic and effective manner. More learning takes place in an environment where the student feels wanted and accepted; therefore, the counseling area can begin to set the stage for the development of this type of learning atmosphere.

At the beginning of the community junior college movement, it was recognized that counseling had to be a vital part of the student's growth. The administrative structures of most colleges have almost universally included Deans of Students as part of the decision-making body and the counseling area has been fairly adequately staffed and financed. But while typically

counseling has been recognized as having a vital role in student success, it is even more critical for the success of the nontraditional student. In many community colleges the role of diagnosing the academic potential and analyzing the past performance of students is assigned to the counseling area. Curriculum and instructional planning is made more effective when it is based on adequate knowledge of the clientele to be served. Therefore, means of assessing the past achievement of students should be carefully planned and cautiously interpreted.

Traditional assessing instruments give a fairly accurate description of the student's achievement in a traditional setting and predict the student's success in a traditional curriculum to a fair degree of accuracy. In a nontraditional curriculum, the usual kinds of assessment do not provide an adequate basis for developing programs to meet the academic needs of individual students.

An academic diagnostic program should include more than one type of measuring instrument. Because most testing instruments do not measure potential, a more accurate picture of these students' assets is achieved when some measures of self and social reactions are also considered. The latter measures are very significant if one remembers that learning is enhanced when the student possesses positive feelings of personal worth.

Probably the most important aspect of diagnosis is that the interpretation of quantitative data concerning nontraditional students should be used with great caution. Diagnosis and prediction do not take into consideration motivation. Many nontraditional students succeed in spite of assessment data; many jump gaps and it is almost impossible to determine which students will do so. Therefore, it is unfair to categorize these students on the basis of test data alone. In fact, it is academically more effective to develop individualized programs of studies for nontraditional students according to their academic skills and interest.

Counseling may have the assignment of helping students to determine their goals. If so, it must be remembered that these students have had little opportunity for goal exploration. Therefore, some provisions should be made for career exploration and personal and social planning. This type of planning is most important in view of the rapid changes taking place in our

society and nontraditionals' lack of knowledge of the career options open to them.

Counseling for nontraditional students should include an awareness of the following:

1. Nontraditional students may not have a background of academic success and are therefore uninterested in further intellectualization.
2. If the counselor does academic placement, the nontraditional student should not be sold a noncollegiate program.
3. Nontraditional students want programs which lead toward rewarding goals.
4. These students want to learn; they are different but not ignorant.
5. Many of these students will suffer the "stranger-complex."
6. Listen to these students; really listen.
7. If a student cannot articulate his or her needs, ask questions and let the student explain.
8. When testing nontraditional students tell them why they are being tested, what the test is purported to yield and how the results are to be used.
9. Interpret the test results for the students. Explain in simple terms and solicit the students' participation in the analysis.
10. Stress only the positive aspects of the test results. Help the student to see his assets and to determine his needs according to the skills or knowledge he will need to achieve his goal.

ACADEMIC PLANNING FOR NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

Recent trends in curriculum and instruction at the community junior college hold great promise for the nontraditional student. Emphasis on career-oriented curricula, individualized instruction, learning styles, cognitive mapping, performance objectives, and many other in-depth approaches for meeting needs of students, all appear to offer help in structuring satisfactory success experiences for nontraditional students.

Many colleges are throwing off the shackles of lock-step time sequences, rigid grading systems and the harness of four walls. All these developments help to bring academic experiences into a more realistic focus for nontraditional students.

A look at some of the academic planning for nontraditional students reveals that the structuring of curriculum programs offer more options. Some examples:

1. In the continuous curriculum, the student may begin at the level of his competency and move at his own pace toward mastery.
2. In the separate curriculum, the student takes special compensatory courses in order to increase his personal, social, and academic skills to a level which will enable him to compete with traditional students.
3. In the laboratory curriculum, the student pursues the same curriculum as the traditional student but has to spend additional time in laboratory situations with tutors.

These examples show the basic intent of community colleges in planning for the nontraditional student. In addition to these curriculum constructs, a variety of systematic instructional strategies have been developed to motivate nontraditional students toward more effective learning. Some of these strategies have been based on cognitive mapping, personality styles, various taxonomies, and concrete-abstract dimensions. "Modes of instruction vary from individual or team work with self-pacing and self-learning systems to discussion groups and laboratories where facts, skills, and ideas must be challenged and organized, from lectures where concepts are developed and related to problem-solving task forces or community experiences where the real world is made an integral part of learning."[2] Planning for the academic experiences of the nontraditional student has taken a variety of forms. Some degree of success can be demonstrated by most colleges using any number of these approaches. The more elaborate evaluation of academic planning is still to be done.

One of the most critical areas of planning learning experiences for nontraditional students is in teacher training. The community college instructor often has had a traditional training experience and has developed a set of expectations for "college students" and "college teaching." This is the

[2]Stanton Leggett, "Learning Program is as Multileveled as the Building", College and University Business, July, 1973, Vol. No. 55, p. 36.

critical point. The humanizing relationships of instructor with students make the real difference. Assurance of success can be attained with a warm, accepting, skillful teacher organizing learning experiences for students.

The literature today contains a wealth of information on appropriate curriculum and instructional strategies for helping the unsuccessful student. Yet there is a dearth of material on teacher behavior and, as Benjamin Bloom has pointed out, how instructors behave toward students rather than their intellectual qualifications makes the real difference. The need for helping faculty to learn how to teach is great or greater than the need to help students learn.

The training (either in-service or graduate school) of teachers who can make a difference must include developing a commitment to the mission of the community junior college. This should be the first step in developing an awareness of the teacher's own orientation to higher education and an examination of the changes the individual has to make in order to be effective with nontraditional students. Traditional training and teaching procedures of community college instructors are predicated on assumptions about students that are no longer valid. This often frightens teachers and when there are no resources to draw on for help, many stop teaching and begin to "hold class."

It is important that academic planning for the nontraditional student include planning for instructor growth as a prime ingredient. Resources should be allocated to facilitate such planning and implementation.

Some suggestions for Academic Planning

1. Involve students, teachers, administrators, and experts in the planning process.
2. Make adequate provisions for in-service training. This should be a continuous process in order to afford the necessary reinforcement needed during the initial period.
3. Allocate adequate resources for instruction. A mix of instructional ingredients may be initially expensive.
4. Examine a variety of curriculum options and include those which help students to achieve their goals.

5. Remember that relevance in curriculum and instructional planning should be formulated around the reality of the student.
6. Remember that nontraditional students expect the curriculum to provide them with experiences which will be valuable, and they want that value demonstrated.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES AND THE NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT

Nontraditional students are seldom seen in an active role in student activities. They feel as threatened by these activities as by the classroom. One of the best models for involving these students in student affairs and extracurricular activities is the one used by the athletic department for intercollegiate sports. The coach seeks out the student and then determines his interest and skill. He introduces the new player to the team and assigns him teammates. Until he becomes integrated into the team he gives him special attention. So for the nontraditional student, someone could determine his or her interests and skills and then seek him or her out. Students could be introduced to the activities in their field of interest, assigned a teammate, and checked on occasionally.

This type of care is necessary if one is concerned with the total development of the nontraditional student. These students know that college is different and they tend to be less adventuresome than the more sucessful student. Further, as the student looks around, there are only a few students from his home territory or age group. Most of the students he recognizes are from groups that he has usually not been associated with in his previous academic or social environment. The insecurity faced in the classroom is carried over into other school activities.

If the college recognizes that part of its mission is to help nontraditional students develop a feeling of self-worth and confidence, it can use its extracurricular activities as a means of reinforcing what takes place in the classroom. Such efforts involve the total college in the total development of the student.

Some Suggestions

1. Develop a strategy for involving nontraditional students in the student activity program. Involve students and faculty in the

planning and execution of this strategy.

2. Develop a feedback mechanism so that nontraditional students can make known their satisfactions and dissatisfactions.
3. Develop a plan for periodic assessment of the strategy.
4. Utilize other community resources as a means of extending campus activities.

SUMMARY

Some may object to such a large palette of suggestions for serving nontraditionals. What about other students? Will they be ignored in an overresponsive rush to help nontraditionals? The answer is that nurturing these students raises the level of consciousness for everyone involved--administrators, faculty, students, and community--by implementing into action the democratic function of the community junior college. Linking lines of communication between presidents and students they serve will benefit the entire college community; formulating realistic and accurate models of assessment for counselors will improve the planning and awareness phase of the entire college program; and casting a hard look at curriculum and its impact on nontraditionals will provide curriculum guidelines for all students. Total institutional commitment to nontraditional students, bolstered by appropriate changes in recruitment, admission, counseling, academic planning, and student activities, will eventually benefit all.

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